REMARKS

Applicants previously acknowledged receipt of the Office Action dated 14 September 2009. Thereafter, Applicants filed an Amendment and Request for Continued Examination on 14 December 2009 while also attempting to conduct an examiner interview. On 22 December 2009, an examiner interview was conducted (with an Interview Summary issued 30 December 2009). Applicants herewith submit a preliminary amendment in accordance with the substance of the examiner interview and respectfully request reconsideration in view of the claim amendments and following remarks.

Examiner Interview

The Interview Summary issued by the Examiner on 30 December 2009 details the telephonic interview conducted between Examiner Bates and Applicants' representative Matt Moscicki. Applicants agree with most of the Interview Summary, specifically that Bullock (6,564,875) does not teach radial expansion and plastic deformation of both tubular members cited by the Examiner, as detailed more fully in the Amendment filed 14 December 2009; and, that abutting the claimed tubular members distinguishes the teaching of Lohbeck (6,273,634). Applicants do not agree, however, that the two tubular members of Lohbeck cited by the Examiner are coupled as claimed. As stressed by Applicants in the examiner interview, claim 1, for example, includes coupling the ends of the tubular members in addition to coupling each of the tubular members to different ends of the sleeve. While Lohbeck teaches coupling each tubular member to different ends of the sleeve, there is no separate step of coupling the ends of the first and second tubular members. Though the Lohbeck tubulars are coupled by virtue of their connection to the sleeve, there is no additional step taught of coupling the tubulars. The pending claims include this additional step, and therefore are distinguished over Lohbeck. Nonetheless, Applicants agreed to amend certain of the claims to further prosecution of the present application, to include abutment as detailed below.

Rejections based on Lohbeck

In furtherance of the remarks made against Lohbeck in the Amendment dated 14 December 2009 and the remarks made above, Applicants amend certain of the pending claims to include "abutting the ends of the first and second tubular members." These claims include 1, 25, 27, 33, 42,

43, 44, 48, 58 and 147. The rejections of these claims were based on Lohbeck, and these claims and their dependent claims should now be distinguished and allowable over the art of record.

Rejections based on Bullock

Applicants rely on the remarks made against Bullock in the Amendment dated 14 December 2009 and the remarks made above to maintain that Bullock is distinguished from any claims rejected using Bullock as the base reference.

Double Patenting

Applicants rely on the remarks made in the Amendment dated 14 December 2009 to respectfully request further clarification of the double patenting rejection so an appropriate response can be formulated. Applicants reserve the right to submit a terminal disclaimer, if necessary, in response to a more specific showing of nonstatutory obviousness-type double patenting.

CONCLUSION

This discussion should not be interpreted to mean that the other limitations can be ignored or dismissed. The claims must be viewed as a whole, and each limitation of the claims must be considered when determining the patentability of the claims. Moreover, it should be understood that there may be other distinctions between the claims and the cited art which have yet to be raised, but which may be raised in the future.

In the event that extensions of time are necessary to allow consideration of this paper, such extensions are hereby petitioned under 37 C.F.R. § 1.136(a), and any fees required are hereby authorized to be charged to Conley Rose, P.C.'s Deposit Account Number 03-2769 (2725-10105).

Respectfully submitted,

   /Matt Moscicki/
Matthew R. Moscicki
Reg. No. 57,524
CONLEY ROSE, P.C.
P. O. Box 3267
Houston, Texas 77253-3267
(713) 238-8000 (Phone)
ATTORNEY FOR APPLICANTS